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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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Pursuant to: Montana Environmental Policy Act
Section 69-6504 (b) (3)

and

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Project No. FG-24

Wayfarer's State Recreation Area

November 16, 1972

Prepared by

Montana Fish and Game Department

Recreation and Parks Division

Helena, Montana

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
FOR
WAYFARER'S STATE RECREATION AREA

I. Purpose

This project will upgrade present facilities and develop new facilities to improve and enlarge the existing recreation area.

II. Description of the Project

The work will include the addition of a 25-unit campground, improvements to the existing picnic area and swimming beach, the addition of creative play equipment, the installation of a boat launching ramp, a sanitary sewer system including a trailer dump station, toilet facilities, central garbage collection area, roads and parking areas, the removal of overhead electrical system and the installation of a new underground electrical distribution system, the installation of a new water system, miscellaneous signs and site improvement including the removing of old buildings and foundations, junk, brush and stump cleanup.

All of the work will be done within the limits of the existing site but will expand the facilities into presently undeveloped areas.

The intent of the project is to increase the capacity of the park, to upgrade the facilities and services available on the area and to protect the site from further deterioration through control of use and the providing of adequate and proper facilities.

III. Description of Existing Environment

A. Human Resources

Wayfarer's State Recreation Area is located near the north end of Flathead Lake on the east shore just south of the confluence of the Lake and the Swan River near Big Fork, Montana.

In addition to Big Fork which lies immediately to the north with a population of 3,200, other close population centers include Kalispell, 18 miles to the north with a population of 10,500, and Polson 31 miles to the south with a population of 2,500.

There is a relatively dense rural population in the vicinity whose residents include fruit orchard and tree farmers, ranchette properties and retirement homes.

The area receives a very high exposure to non-resident visitors enjoying the recreation potential of the Flathead Lake and Valley, Glacier Park and the other outstanding outdoor opportunities of northwest Montana.

B. Physiography and Geology

The recreation area occupies a sloped site with elevations ranging from 2892 feet above sea level at the water's edge to a high point of 3075 feet above sea level at the interior of the park. The grades range from steep with stone cliffs to a relatively flat meadow of approximately three acres in size. Most of the development will take place on gentle slopes through both wooded and meadown areas. The picnic area slopes gradually to the water's edge forming a bay and thus partially sheltered beach. The remaining property shoreline is an outcropping of rock ledges.

There are no springs, stream or ponds on the property.

The west half of the park is underlain by glacio lacustrine deposits of clay and silt and are relatively impermeable.

Underlying the glacial deposits and outcropping in the eastern part of the site are sedimentary rocks of the belt supergroup (Precambrian).

The general vicinity is in the northern Rocky Mountain Physiographic Province along the west flank of the Block Faulted Mission Mountain Range. The Mission Range and the Kalispell Valley were formed prior to Pleistocene glaciation. A lobe of the ice sheet advanced down the valley and coalesced

with an alpine glacier advancing from the Swan Valley in the general vicinity of the recreation site. Glaciation beveled the north end of the Mission Range and deposited hundreds of feet of till morainal material and glacio lacustrine deposits in the valley. Flathead Lake is a descendent of an arm of the earlier Pleistocene glacieral Flathead Lake.

C. Land Use

The site which contains approximately 62½ acres is presently being used as recreation area. Useis now confined to a few acres in the northwest corner near the shore and to the extreme east end which is a highway rest area recently turned over to the Fish and Game Department for administration. Fourteen acres of the existing site were acquired from the State Highway Department in this transaction--the plot forming the east end of the park.

The remaining acreage was acquired from the Big Fork Masonic Lodge who for many years used it as a private resort and retreat. Prior to acquisition by the State, the site stood abandoned for several years. The lodge, cabins and residences deteriorated to the point where most will have to be torn down.

There is evidence that the area was selectively logged many years ago.

Neighboring land use includes a trailer court and tourist cabin complex near the park entrance on the north side near the shore, a few private residences near the northeast corner of the park and adjacent to Highway 35 which borders the property on the east, a small farm-ranchette operation bordering the park on the south and a small lakeshore resort distance beyond.

Scattered throughout the general vicinity are home sites and small fruit orchards.

D. Fish and Wildlife

Flathead Lake contains a variety of fish life including kokanee salmon, Dolly Varden, rainbow trout, mackinaw and cutthroat trout.

Wildlife found on the site are principally ground squirrels, marmots, rodents and a few deer. A variety of small bird species are present and migrating ducks and geese.

The area is not critical range or corridor for any species.

E. Vegetative Resources

The site is heavily wooded with a mature stand of fir, larch and pine and in selected areas birch, ash and cottonwood.

The understory shrubbery is relatively dense in many areas. However, throughout the woods there are small open grassy areas and one three-acre meadow.

The area shows evidence of having been selectively logged many years ago.

F. Climate

The climate is generally moderate with occasionally extreme cold in winter and hot summer days occasionally.

Winter - average daytime temperature plus 20 degrees Fahrenheit with minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit to minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit for short periods.

Summer - average daytime temperatures plus 85 degrees Fahrenheit with plus 98 degrees Fahrenheit for short durations. Nights are generally cool and comfortable.

Annual precipitation - approximately 18 inches.

G. Transportation Systems

There are no transportation systems on the site except the entrance road presently entering the area on the northwest corner and the rest area

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on the extreme east end of the property. The area is served by Montana Highway 35 which runs along the east shore of Flathead Lake from Polson to Big Fork. The highway receives relatively heavy local use from residents who live along the shore and heavy non-resident vacation use by people enroute to Glacier Park, the Flathead Valley or other points in northwest Montana.

H. Utility Systems

There are no utility systems on the property except the electrical service line which serves the site. Most of this will be removed and reconstructed underground to serve the facilities.

IV. Evaluation of Environmental Impact

A. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

The proposed developments will be compatible with existing on-site and surrounding land use.

There will be no mineral or construction material extraction from the project area. Land form will not significantly be altered and there are no unique physical features present on the site.

The water quality of Flathead Lake will remain unaffected and except near the shore, an underground water table is not present. Ground water may be found only in deep rock stratas. It will remain unaffected.

Potential erosion will be controlled by methods discussed further in this text.

Trees, shrubbery and grass covers will be significantly affected by this work. Some trees will have to be cut and shrubbery removed to permit road construction and other facility installation. Grass will, of course, be removed under facilities and will probably be abused in some areas as a result of increased public use. This impact will be minimized as much as possible.

The project is not expected to create any barriers to animal migrations, nor is the project considered to be critical range for any species.

The area does not possess wilderness qualities, and though open spaces will be encroached upon by the developments, scenic views and vistas will be preserved.

The project will enhance the camping and picnicking activities that currently are present on the site.

Except to increase the visitation to the park, the development will not alter any existing cultural patterns of the area and except for increased vehicular traffic, will not endanger the health or safety of residents or users and will not increase the population density of the vicinity.

Transportation movement and access will remain unchanged.

A total of 45 picnic tables will be installed in the area, 25 for the camp area and 20 for the picnic area. These tables will be installed on small gravel pads in selected open or small cleared areas.

Thirty-five stand-up type charcoal grills will also be installed. There will be a gravel or concrete pad under each stove of sufficient size to minimize fire danger. Fire on the ground will be confined to approved fire circles which will be cleared of combustible materials to minimize fire hazard. Campfires outside approved stoves will not be allowed.

A generous number of garbage cans, complete with fixed racks, will be scattered at convenient locations throughout the site. A central garbage collection area consisting of a concrete pad and unitized hoppers will be installed for use by the caretaker. All garbage will be disposed in legal landfills off the project.

The creative play equipment will be installed in the existing highway rest area in a location which will discourage children from playing near the highway.

The swimming beach development will consist mostly of cleanup, a little brush clearing back from the shoreline and the placement of clean sand where necessary.

The boat launching facility will consist of a 20-foot wide concrete ramp which will follow the natural contour of the lake bottom and which will be installed during time of low water so that the water quality will not be endangered during the construction period. No work will take place in the water and the shoreline will not be significantly changed except for some slight leveling and the possible placement of riprap along the ramp edges if necessary.

The swimming area will be buoyed from the launch area to eliminate possible conflict between swimmers and boaters.

The toilet facilities will consist of two new sealed vault latrines which will not introduce any sewage into the ground and which will be pumped as necessary with the sewage disposed of in a legal manner off the site. In addition, one modern flush toilet will be installed in the campground and the existing flush toilet in the picnic area will be upgraded with sewage from both disposed of as discussed further in the text.

A sanitary trailer dump station will be conveniently located for use by the campers.

The sewage disposal system will consist of separate septic tanks and lift pumps for new modern comfort station, trailer dump station, caretaker's residence and existing flush toilet. The septic tank effluents will be pumped through sealed lines to one force main which will discharge into the Big Fork Sanitary Sewer System. No sewage effluents will be discharged into the ground. The Big Fork system provides secondary treatment by trickle filter."

Presently the caretaker's quarters and the existing toilet are served by separate and quite inadequate drain fields. These will be taken out of service.

Trenches for the collection lines and force mains will be sited in open areas or along road shoulders to eliminate the need for tree cutting. Topsoil will be replaced and reseeded at the completion of the construction.

The portion of the existing overhead electrical service which is a visual intrusion to campground users will be removed and in its place a new underground system will be installed. The trenches will be confined to road shoulders and meander through open spaces to minimize the impact to the natural areas.

Water service to the area will come from the Big Fork Municipal System and will include courtesy hydrants located at convenient points throughout the area and service to the administrative site, dump station and toilet facilities. Again, the trenches will be located in the road shoulders where possible and will meander through open areas where necessary. Trenches will be topsoiled and reseeded after completion of construction.

Generally, the road system will be designed to fit the natural terrain as much as possible. Cuts and fills will be kept to an absolute minimum with back slopes as flat as practicable. Ditches will be shallow and used only where absolutely necessary. Most areas will be sheet drained so that the natural drainage is preserved.

Some tree cutting and brush removal will be necessary. However, clearing will be done selectively with shrubbery and trees left as screening to preserve the natural atmosphere and provide privacy between sites.

Equipment will be confined to the road services during construction. The road will have a gravel base course and be surfaced with a two-shot penetration oil coat. Large parking areas will also be oiled to eliminate dust which would otherwise be a problem, but the camp spurs and pull-throughs will receive only gravel surfacing.

The main entrance road will have a 24-foot wide driving surface with two to three-foot wide shoulders. Two-way interior circulation roads will have a 20-foot wide driving surface with one and one-half to two foot shoulders. One-way roads will be 12 feet wide with a one foot to one and one-half foot shoulder. Camp spurs will be 20 feet wide by 30 feet deep. Pull-throughs will be 12 feet wide by 110 feet long including approaches. Parking spaces will be approximately 20 feet deep minimum. Boat trailer parking spaces will be approximately 40 feet deep.

All parking areas, pull-throughs and camp spurs will be field located to take advantage of natural openings and suitable grades. The road will in some cases follow existing rights-of-way and where it does not, will meander through existing openings. Some tree cutting and brush removal will be necessary.

The project will also include miscellaneous site improvement consisting of the razing of the old lodge and cabin buildings and their foundations, miscellaneous junk and debris clean-up and the construction of a few foot trails which will meander through the camp and picnic areas. Hopefully, the foot trails will direct foot traffic to surfaced paths and thereby protect the site from erosion caused by promiscuous paths crisscrossing the area.

Existing unused roads and trails will be restored to their natural condition by topsoiling, if necessary, and reseeding. Traffic will be confined by suitable barriers to the developed road system.

B. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided

The installation of the new campground and the resulting clearing of trees and ground cover necessary for road and facility installation will probably create the most significant impact. But when one considers that much of the area to be developed is presently being used in an uncontrolled manner the necessary improvements should go a long way to protecting the site from further deterioration.

Another impact that will definitely be present is the increased visitation that the new developments will encourage. While this is not a new use for the area nor is it incompatible with present surrounding use, it will result in increased traffic past the trailer court and tourist cabin complex near the entrance on the north side. The road is presently unpaved outside the park entrance and creates a dust problem. This impact will be minimized by applying a dust palliative to the road at the time of the park development.

Hopefully, the increased traffic past these facilities will be present only for a few years. The long-range plans for the site include the installation of an entrance road which will connect the existing highway rest area with the developments now being proposed on the shore. When this happens, all traffic through the neighboring residential area will be eliminated.

Finally, increased litter, fire hazards and site deterioration could be potential problems as a result of increased use. However, the site will be maintained and controlled by a resident caretaker at all times when the park is open. When the park is being used to capacity the gate will be closed and other users turned away. Use will be policed to minimize unauthor-

ized activities. Proper use and control of the proposed facilities should adequately protect the site.

C. Alternatives

One alternative would be to close the park and return it to its natural state. This is not being considered because of the obvious need for this kind of development in the Flathead area.

Another alternative would be to give up the site to another developer. This, too, has been discarded as not being desirable because we feel that the Fish and Game Department is qualified to do a proper job of development which will allow for a compatible use of the area and yet protect and preserve the site.

Another alternative would be to do nothing in the way of development and continue using the park in its present state. This too, would seem impractical as the area is presently receiving heavy use which is overtaxing existing facilities, and abusing the site because of lack of control. Existing sanitary facilities which we inherited with the property have not been installed in a proper manner.

Several site plans and use patterns were considered for the area, but the present proposal is the one which will provide the desired facilities, is most compatible with the terrain and natural features will allow for future expansion and improvement and can be accomplished for the available money.

Finally, another alternative would be to do a complete job of park development at this time. This would be more desirable from an administrative point of view, would allow increased use of the expanded area and would eliminate the need for further construction phases and the resulting intrusions created by them. We cannot afford this alternative.

D. Short-Term -- Long-Term Use

The environmental impact during the short-term construction period will consist of noise and dust pollution from the construction in the park, increased heavy equipment traffic on the roads leading to the park and will close the park to public use during time of construction. Dust will be minimized by watering the construction surfaces to hold down dust and by working only during conventional work hours. Construction materials, such as gravel, will come from approved locations outside the project.

On a long-term basis the character of use will be what it is today except that it will increase. This is a compatible use for this area and will not alter the life style or economics of the region.

E. Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The project will not extract any mineral resources nor significantly alter the land form. It will have no appreciable effect on the quality of water in the lake or underground. Aside from the necessary though limited, tree cutting, there will be no irreversible commitment of any resources. The site could be restored to its natural state.

F. Discussion of Problems and Objections by Other Agencies or the Public

The developments at Wayfarer State Recreation Area will provide camping space and access to Flathead Lake. These facilities are in demand in the Flathead area and public acceptance is anticipated.

V. Benefits

There is an obvious need and demand for this type of recreational facility in the Flathead Valley. Both the local population and traveling public will use the site. This type of development is sought by local residents as being desirable both from a recreational and economic point of view.

VI. Summary Statement

Wayfarer's Recreation Area is a highly desirable site from an aesthetics and recreational point of view. Developed as proposed, it could be an outstanding addition to the parks system. There is an environmental price to pay when one compares the proposed development to a natural untouched area. However, when compared to the existing facilities and use patterns, the price is minimal.

Compared to what is in store for the site if nothing is done, it is a definite improvement.

VII. Mailing Distribution

2 - Environmental Quality Council
✓Division of Planning and Economic Development
✓Office of the Governor
✓Region 1, Fish and Game Department
✓Student Environmental Research Center
✓Department of Natural Resources
✓Department of Health
✓Department of Architecture and Engineering
✓Flathead Lakers
✓Polson Outdoors
✓Montana Highway Department
✓Regional Office, U. S. Forest Service
✓U. S. Department of the Interior
✓Clifford Martinka, National Park Service